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ABSTRACT

This study examined students' and teachers' attitudes toward using black dialect (BD) in a community college writing program. White educators completed a Language Aptitude Survey and followup interviews. African American students completed interviews. Teachers held Standard English (SE) in high regard and did not agree with using Ebonics in English classrooms. Their attitudes toward ebonics were positive in many areas (e.g., they did not consider it an inferior language and felt it should be considered an influential part of U.S. culture). They tended to agree that children who spoke Ebonics were able to express ideas as well as children who spoke SE and that Ebonics did not have a faulty grammar system. Although teachers disagreed that the scholastic level of a school would fail if teachers allowed Ebonics to be spoken, they generally felt that teachers should not allow black students to use Ebonics in class. Teachers made some statements that could possibly hinder student learning (e.g., it is a student's choice to accept SE or not, and thus to fail or not). Students tended to find English class frustrating because it felt like "learning another language". They believed they were being real when using BD. All students discussed feeling alienated during their education and few had learned much about African American history in school. (Contains 23 references.) (SM)

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An Exploration of Students' and Teachers' Attitudes toward Ebonics in a Community College Writing Program

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An Exploration of Students' and Teachers' Attitudes toward Ebonics in a Community College Writing Program

Background

From my several years of experience teaching English at a two-year college and a community college, the African American student who can write in the standard format is the exception. Research related to Ebonics/Black Dialect points to barriers that may exist between African American students and teachers in the teaching-learning process of writing. Such obstacles are documented as dialect and cultural differences and can sometimes be related to historical factors. If such obstacles separate teachers and African American students, teachers may not be able to provide the best instruction to help students acquire Standard English skills, which is essential to the success of African American students in academic and occupational environments.

Renowned linguist J. L. Dillard (1972), who has researched Black Dialect (BD) for forty years and has written numerous books and articles, says, "the freshman English course is notoriously one of the great causes of dropouts at the freshman college level"

(p. 277-8). He sees it as one of the most difficult for black students. My study looks at the conflict that exists in the teaching-learning process of writing at the community college level.

Noted linguist Labov (1972), who pioneered a substantial amount of research and studies in Black Dialect, discusses two types of ignorance that hinder progress in the teaching-learning process of writing: one is the ignorance of Standard English (SE) rules by those who speak non-standard English. The other one is the ignorance of non-standard English rules by teachers and those who write English books. I hope to document these areas for further study and development of methods that will improve the process for both teachers and students.

Epps (1985) says that the freshman-writing course is often a confusing maze for students and rarely achieves the goal of helping students to grow in writing or as individuals. This is particularly true for minority and poor students. Epps believes that it is more important to develop critical thinking skills and self-respect for one's experiences, as well as opportunities for self-development. This will help students to feel that they have something worth writing about and will lead students to an awareness of themselves and the world around them. To this end,

they will be more cognizant of the benefits and uses of literacy (p. 156-7). She believes this is essential since Composition can be "the gatekeeper of the inequalities perpetuated in the American system....It is a craft course which helps students get ahead in society" (p. 155).

Freeman (1973) offers more specific data that builds on Epps' philosophical critique. She says that part of the difficulties that black students have in the freshman composition class begins the moment students enter the classroom. They must wrestle with literary models selected for patterns or themes that are usually written by "sophisticated white essayists." Then there are drills, and exercises on usage and grammar. The student tries to listen to lectures on style, logic, rhetoric, and structure, and all of this is foreign to him or her. The student can easily find a passive role the only recourse. Freeman says, "The student either fails the course or drops out of college....In any event, original thought and creative production on the student's part are destroyed rather than developed" (p. 130-1). The student is not able to enhance and modify the image he came to school with. The images of the self become distorted as the student fails or receives negative feedback.

Research at the community college level is essential since it is an open access environment where many students are required to take developmental courses, and where they have the opportunity to hone these basic skills. Also, quite often these students do not qualify academically for admittance to four-year institutions. Consequently, it may be students' last chance for academic success. Still, in the community college environment with many resources, such as tutoring center, writing center, counseling services, many students fail to acquire Standard English writing skills, which is an essential basic academic and occupational tool in the current socio-political context.

W. Norton Grubb (1999) in *Honored But Invisible: An Inside Look at Teaching in Community Colleges* says that nearly half of all students entering college for the first time did so through a community college. Not only do students find the tuition and fees more manageable, they are also provided with a 'second chance,' academically. These students are usually commuter students and other non-traditional students, including low income, minorities, older adults, divorced women, displaced workers, immigrants, and others. They are less academically prepared, requiring many to take remedial and developmental courses (pp. 5-7). There is a great

divide in education, and community colleges help to bridge that gap by providing open access and comprehensive services for the pedagogical challenges that may exist among students.

Overview of the literature

Racism is the historical context for the emergence and continuance of BD. This began even before the slave ships as blacks sought a mode of communication. Blacks in this country have survived under the most horrendous conditions, and BD has become a testament to what they have had to overcome in such forms as proverbs, work songs, spirituals, poetry, folktales, blues, gospel, jazz, rap lyrics, and literature. BD is a language that has been uniquely fashioned by African Americans, so much so, that white America has adopted usage of many of its words and phrases. Musicians, writers, preachers, black leaders, and other prominent blacks have further legitimized the language by making it public language. The language that many blacks once felt so shameful about is one that they now use with pride because they enjoy doing so. It is intricately tied into their identity. This makes accepting SE that much more difficult for them, especially since SE is tied to the group of people in this country who still oppress

black people. It's perfectly logical, then, that blacks should have this ambivalence to SE. For many blacks, SE has come to represent "white" English, and it is symbol of hatred and oppression to them. Some blacks use the term Uncle Tom to describe other blacks who use SE. Much of these perceptions are etched in the psyche of the black man. Teachers need to have this knowledge in order to find approaches to help African American students accept and grasp SE concepts.

Teachers should also have knowledge of the structure and characteristics of BD. Contrary to many people's opinion of it as being a haphazard speech pattern, it is a systematic, rule-governed dialect with its own logic and distinctions. Researchers in the field corroborate these findings: Abraham & Gay, 1975; Baugh, 1999; Baratz, 1970; Fasold & Wolfram, 1975; Smitherman, 1977, 1985, 2000; Taylor, 1973. Teachers will be better able to assist students in their efforts of grasping SE concepts if they are aware of the variety of styles in which students communicate and dispense with the assumption that if a student is not adept in SE that he or she is not adept in any language. They should also be familiar with the differences, particularly in pronunciation, verb forms, negation, suffixes, and possessives; these are the more common features of

BD. Sociolinguistic factors also need to be taken into account. Non-verbal sounds, cues, and gestures are part of the communication style of African American students. Teachers can also become more familiar with some of the words and phrases that African American students use by listening to them when they are communicating. If these words are heard in context, their meaning can be understood. This will be helpful when students have to translate BD into SE.

African American students are desperately trying to communicate with their teachers everyday. This genuine communication is met with rejection and denial since teachers do not understand, or they reject these communication styles. Further, it should be understood that African American students have fluency, and this should be the starting point. If teachers are at least aware of these factors, they will be better able to build a bridge to SE for their African American students. This is urgent because black students are failing miserably across the country, and composition proficiency will help eliminate some of the inequalities in the system. If educators are sincere in their attempts to want to help these students, these measures should be well worth their time and effort in undertaking.

Understanding the structure and characteristics of Ebonics is just the starting point. As the *King vs. Ann Arbor* case illustrated,[1] teachers' negative attitudes toward African American students can erect a barrier for student learning, and these negative attitudes can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Knowledge of BD along with positive teacher attitudes goes hand-in-hand. Students' language should not be a predictor of how well they will do since stereotyping and labeling can be detrimental as well. Understanding that students come from a different culture with different modes of expressions should be the starting point because students are aware of the negative associations when attributed to them and their culture. This can have the effect of turning students off to learning. In a hostile and alienating atmosphere, students often fail or dropout if they are unable to cope under such extreme conditions. Only through teacher training can teachers become aware of these important factors since the attitudes of the larger society are often encompassed in the classroom.

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[1] On July 28, 1977, the case of the *Martin Luther King Elementary School vs. Ann Arbor School District* was presided over by Judge Charles W. Joiner. This case would help to establish the significant linguistic differences between SE and BD. The court ruled that the school board did not provide sufficient leadership and training for its teachers about the existence of Black English; therefore the students were not properly educated and were in danger of becoming functionally illiterate (Bailey, 1983).

Once teachers have a full understanding of the detrimental effects that negative teacher attitudes can have on student learning, and they are armed with knowledge about BD and its historical context, then they can develop or utilize pedagogical approaches that will meet the needs of the students who they teach. There are a number of culturally relevant teaching approaches in place that take students' culture into account (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1996; and the Oakland School Board's Resolution, 1996). They allow students to choose academic success yet still keep their identity intact. It is empowering since students' keep the richness of their home language while being taught about their African past and how BD evolved. Added to this are practices that awaken the students' critical consciousness (Freire, 1970 & 1973; McCrary, 2001). When students understand their situatedness in society, they will become motivated to seek the tools that they will need to be successful on their own. These research-based approaches can certainly be used as a starting point; however, practices should be implemented that take particular populations and their needs into account.

Methodology

Understanding students and teachers' attitudes surrounding the use of BD in a community college writing program will provide a deeper understanding of what is at stake for an effective learning environment to ensue. The experiences of teachers and African American students are powerfully affected by the dynamics of the socio-political climate of which we live. The methodology used in this section was designed to understand the dynamics and complexities surrounding BD and its effect on teaching and on learning.

As much as possible I tried to follow the Naturalistic Inquiry (NI) method. With this method the problem is resolved by accumulating sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding or explanation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 227). It is a process that is "largely emergent, open-ended, and inductive." Although it has boundaries, it is flexible enough to include all possibilities: "plans remain contingent on variables that may change at any and all points" (224-7). Conventional methods are not as flexible and tend to become restrictive. NI is more fitting since the act of research is a process of discovery that is predicated on theory and experiential

knowledge, which should guide but not limit the choices. This study, however, includes both qualitative and quantitative data.

This research was conducted at a community college in upstate New York. The College's enrollment is close to 7,000 students (full and part-time). Seventy percent of entering freshman are required to take some form of non-credit developmental coursework to develop their basic skills. In a 1997 study on attrition, it was found that Latino, African American, Native American, and white students experienced the attrition rates of 60.5%, 50%, 45%, and 35%, respectively. The college offers a broad range of support services, including math tutoring lab, writing center, content tutoring center, counseling services, and an office for students with special needs.

There were five questions that guided the research process: 1 & 2) What are community college composition teachers' attitudes toward Standard English and Ebonics? 3 & 4) What are African American students' attitudes toward Standard English and Ebonics? 5) What are the implications for improved teaching and learning of Standard English in community college level composition classes for teachers and African American students?

The research centered on the English Department and was comprised of two parts: Faculty Investigations and African American Students Investigations. For the faculty investigations, I administered a survey to full-time and part-time members of the department. Nineteen full-time faculty responded, or 82.6%, and four part-time faculty responded, or 11.1%. Because of the low response rate from adjunct faculty, the study is largely an investigation of full-time faculty.

I used a validated Language Aptitude Survey (Taylor 1973), which I gained permission to use. This instrument was designed to solicit data on attitudes toward non-standard English and Ebonics. The Language Attitude Scale survey consists of twenty-five questions and could be completed in ten to fifteen minutes. In addition, faculty were asked to fill out a Demographic Information Form.

After administering the survey to English Department faculty, I interviewed five of these previously surveyed faculty members. The interviews were designed to validate and extend attitudes and issues raised in the survey. The follow-up interviewees were selected from among the several individuals who indicated a willingness to be interviewed. The selection was

narrowed down to those who taught primarily composition skills. All interview participants are white even though one black male in the department was selected to participate; however, schedules did not permit the interview to take place.

I also gathered qualitative data while interviewing five African American students. These students were selected from a group of student volunteers solicited through student groups. The first interview was to establish the context of the participants' experiences. Therefore the participants' earlier educational experiences were discussed in order to understand how these experiences might relate to current difficulties or successes in learning SE. Students' knowledge of African American history and BD was also ascertained. This was done to gauge students' awareness of the world around them and their place in it. The second interviews were conducted to concentrate more fully on the students' current experiences in a writing classroom. Students were asked to relate current relationships with students, teachers, and others. In the interviews, students learn to make sense/meaning out of their educational experiences, particularly as it pertains to the writing classroom. This helps to give the researcher an understanding of the experiences that the student has undergone

and the meaning that he or she has attached to those experiences. A second interview is also useful to validate and confirm earlier statements.

Data collection was done during the fall 2001 semester, beginning with the faculty surveys. After the surveys were administered and returned, faculty tape-recorded interviews began with five of the previously surveyed professors. Next, I tape recorded interviews with five African American students (two, one and a half hour interviews). All interviews were transcribed by the researcher immediately in order to preserve the essence of the interview and to shape the subsequent interview questions. When possible, I shared transcripts with participants to clarify content and interpretation.

Faculty Investigations

The Demographic questionnaire brought forth the following data on the 23 survey participants: Gender: 13 males and 10 females; Ethnicity: 1 African American, 21 Caucasian, 1 Hispanic; Locations where participants were raised: 4 rural, 12 suburban, 7 urban; Years of teaching: 0 in the 1-6 years, 2 in the 7-

12 years, 21 in the 13 and over years; College attendance locations: 22 in the NE, 1 in the S, 5 in the NW, 2 in the W.

Analysis of Language Attitude Scale

The validated Language Attitude Scale (LAS) was administered to all full and part-time faculty in the English department. The twenty-three respondents are the same individuals represented in the Demographic Profile. Participants were asked to complete the survey, which consisted of twenty-five questions that would ascertain their attitudes toward non-standard English and Ebonics. Values assigned to the questions were: strongly agree = 5, mildly agree = 4, neutral = 3, mildly disagree = 2, or strongly disagree = 1. The survey was administered in order to answer research questions one, two, and five. The data has been grouped in response to each of those three questions. As well, a category of What the Survey Did Not Say emerged from the investigation. **(See survey results in Table 1.)**

Question One: What are community college composition teacher's attitudes toward Standard English? It was no surprise that faculty members would hold Standard English in high regard because as members of an English Department, their mission is to educate students in the Standard English format since

it will benefit them academically and occupationally. Therefore the higher percentage of respondents disagreed that teachers should allow black students to use Ebonics in the English classroom while a small percentage remained neutral (#6). However, the respondents largely agreed that it would be okay to use Ebonics in a predominately black school with predominately black students (#18):

The larger percentage of respondents strongly or mildly disagreed that the use of Ebonics will not hinder a child's ability to achieve in school. Therefore they saw the Ebonics speaking child's language as a handicap to success, which would imply that a child who spoke Standard English would not face such a hindrance (#12). This assumption could have the effect of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Question Two: What are community college composition teachers' attitudes toward Ebonics? Respondents' attitudes toward Ebonics were positive in many areas. The responses to the following survey questions convey this: Respondents mainly disagreed that Ebonics is simply a misuse of Standard English (#2). Respondents mainly disagreed that Ebonics should be discouraged (#7). Respondents mainly disagreed that it

is an inferior language system (#9). In fact, Ebonics should be considered an influential part of American culture (#11):

Question Five: What are implications for improved teaching and learning of Standard English in community college level composition classes for teachers and African American students? There were some attitudes and dispositions that were conveyed through the survey that had implications for improved teaching-learning for teachers and African American students. Responses that would promote student learning are the following: respondents strongly or mildly agreed that a child who speaks Ebonics is able to express ideas as well as the child who speaks SE (#10). By acknowledging that SE and BD are two different forms of communication that are both capable of communicating ideas in totality, presents a positive starting point for the teacher and the African American student. As well, the larger percentage of respondents agreed that Ebonics is a clear, thoughtful language (#14). Respondents largely disagreed that Ebonics has a faulty grammar system (#23), acknowledging, therefore, that it is a structured system and as such can be understood in order to help African American students grasp SE concepts:

Some respondents exhibited attitudes and dispositions that could hinder the teaching-learning process. These were exhibited in the following responses: respondents largely agreed by only 47.8% that eliminating Ebonics in school could be psychologically damaging while thirteen percent were neutral, indicating a lack of knowledge in order to decide (#3). Respondents largely disagreed that teachers should allow Black students to use Ebonics in class, while again thirteen percent were neutral (#6). If this is the language that many of these students bring to the classroom, this must be the starting point in order for them to grasp SE concepts. Respondents largely disagreed that Ebonics must be accepted if pride is to be developed, while again thirteen percent were neutral (#8). Clearly if a person's language is rejected so is he being rejected. Finally, respondents were divided with thirteen respondents neutral, on the survey question that if Ebonics is encouraged, speakers of Ebonics will be more motivated to achieve (#13).

What the Survey Did Not Say emerged as a theme: A contradiction in two survey questions shows ambivalence in allowing BD usage in the school. Although respondents disagreed that the scholastic level of a school will fail if teachers allow

Ebonics to be spoken (#1), they largely disagreed that teachers should allow Black students to use Ebonics in the classroom (#6).

Although earlier, respondents had positive attitudes towards Ebonics, it is clear they see no place for it within the school. This disposition is further strengthened when respondents largely agreed that Non-standard English should be accepted socially (#22). However, if this is the language of the student, it will be the one he must begin with, so there must be some level of acceptance of Ebonics in order to move the student from point A (BD) to point B (SE).

Although respondents largely disagreed that continued usage of a non-standard dialect of English will accomplish nothing worthwhile for students, still 26.1 percent agreed and 13 percent were neutral (#4). Again, this contradicts earlier mentioned, more positive assessments of Ebonics. Also, respondents largely disagreed that the academic potential of Ebonics speaking students will not improve until they replaced their dialect with SE. Still, 39% agreed and 8.7% were neutral (#25). Replacing a dialect means discarding the old one. Would anyone really ask someone

TABLE I	strongly disagree		mildly disagree		neutral		mildly agree		strongly agree		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
1. The scholastic level of a school will fail if teachers allow Ebonics (Black English) to be spoken	9	39.10%	6	26.10%	5	21.70%	2	8.70%	1	4.30%	23
2. Ebonics (Black English) is simply a misuse of Standard English	16	69.60%	4	17.40%	1	4.30%	2	8.70%			23
3. Attempts to eliminate Ebonics (Black English) in school will result in a situation that can be psychologically damaging to Black children	3	13.00%	6	26.10%	3	13.00%	6	26.10%	5	21.70%	23
4. Continue usage of a non-standard dialect of English will accomplish nothing worthwhile for students	8	38.10%	4	19.00%	3	14.30%	4	19.00%	2	9.50%	21
5. Ebonics (Black English) sounds as a good as Standard English	5	22.70%	3	13.60%	7	31.80%	4	18.20%	3	13.60%	22
6. Teachers should allow Black students to use Ebonics in the classroom	4	19.00%	6	28.60%	3	14.30%	7	33.30%	1	4.80%	21
7. Ebonics should be discouraged	8	36.40%	6	27.30%	2	9.10%	4	18.20%	2	9.10%	22
8. Ebonics must be accepted if pride is to develop among Black children	2	9.10%	8	36.40%	3	13.60%	5	22.70%	4	18.20%	22
9. Ebonics is an inferior language system	15	65.20%	2	8.70%	6	26.10%					23
10. A child who speaks Ebonics is able to express ideas as well as the child who speaks Standard English			3	13.60%	4	18.20%	5	22.70%	10	45.50%	22
11. Ebonics should be considered an influential part of American culture and civilization	1	4.50%	1	4.50%			8	36.40%	12	54.50%	22
12. The use of Ebonics will not hinder a child's ability to achieve in school	7	33.30%	7	33.30%	2	9.50%	2	9.50%	3	14.30%	21
13. If the use of Ebonics is encouraged, speakers of Ebonics will be more motivated to achieve	4	19.00%	5	23.80%	3	14.30%	7	33.30%	2	9.50%	21
14. Ebonics is a clear, thoughtful and expressive language			2	9.10%	7	31.80%	6	27.30%	7	31.80%	22
15. Ebonics is too imprecise to be an effective means of communications	10	45.50%	4	18.20%	8	36.40%					22
16. Children who speak Ebonics lack the basic concepts of plurality and negation	10	45.50%	5	22.70%	4	18.20%	3	13.60%			22
17. A teacher should correct a student's use of non-standard English	3	14.30%	2	9.50%	4	19.00%	8	38.10%	4	19.00%	21
18. In a predominantly Black school, Ebonics, as well as Standard English should be used	1	4.80%	5	23.80%	4	19.00%	6	28.60%	5	23.80%	21
19. Widespread acceptance of Ebonics is imperative	4	19.00%	8	38.10%	2	9.50%	5	23.80%	2	9.50%	21
20. The sooner non-standard dialects of English are eliminated, the better	13	59.10%	3	13.60%	5	22.70%	1	4.50%			22
21. Acceptance of Ebonics by teachers will lead to a lowering of educational standards in school	7	31.80%	6	27.30%	2	9.10%	7	31.80%			22
22. Non-standard English should be accepted socially			3	13.60%	3	13.60%	9	40.90%	7	31.80%	22
23. Ebonics has a faulty grammar system	12	54.50%	2	9.10%	6	27.30%	2	9.10%			22
24. One of the goals of the American school system should be the standardization of the English language	5	22.70%	6	27.30%	4	18.20%	4	18.20%	3	13.60%	22
25. The academic potential of Ebonics speaking students will not improve until they replace their dialect with Standard English	5	22.70%	6	27.30%	2	9.10%	6	27.30%	3	13.60%	22

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speaking a foreign language to totally discard his or her native language in order to learn English? This statement indicates that a substantial amount of respondents see BD as being unworthy of maintaining. Even if black students were in agreement to discard their language, it would prove too difficult.

Throughout the survey, there was a frequent use of the neutral response. This indicates that either respondents did not wish to reveal attitudes that would be viewed as unfavorable toward Ebonics, or they lacked a thorough understanding and a sufficient knowledge of the subject to comment. In either case, this can be viewed as a hindrance in the teaching-learning process of SE.

Faculty Interviews

Data from the first three faculty interviews are presented. These previously surveyed faculty members were interviewed for at least an hour in order to explore and extend attitudes and issues raised in the questionnaire/survey. Therefore the consistency of the findings in the Language Attitude Survey is examined with regard to the research questions. In addition, the emerging theme of Dichotomy of worlds is examined. The faculty consisted of one white female and two white males. Together the teaching

experiences of these three individuals total over sixty-five years. All teach composition courses at the college, as well as several other courses.

Research Question One: What are community college teachers' attitudes toward Standard English? When asked their views on standard vs. non-standard English usage, participants voiced similar responses to those in the Language Attitude Survey. Faculty have a high regard for Standard English because they see it as a tool to help students advance in the "real world," which denotes that African American students everyday life (home, community) is not real. Faculty see SE as the only acceptable form in the classroom. They feel that SE is the language of the majority, and that there is a time and a place for other dialects, which is either in the home or community. They feel that students must have an awareness of where they are, and based on that they should select the language that is "proper" and "acceptable" for that audience if they want to communicate clearly.

Research Question Two: What are community college composition teachers' attitudes toward Ebonics? Participants' responses more or less mirrored the responses to the questions in the Language Attitude Survey; however, the researcher tried to

extend and explore those answers. Participants made comparisons with Ebonics speakers and other second language speakers. They felt that African Americans would have to do as these groups did, speak the language of the majority because they, too, are a minority. Two of the individuals understood that Ebonics was a structured, rule governed system, but none had an in-depth understanding of its many features. None of the participants felt that anything was wrong with Ebonics in its place. They felt the language was not theirs and that the Ebonics movement was asking teachers to embrace Ebonics. Actually, the proponents of this movement are asking that teachers understand it in order to help students build a bridge to SE.

Research Question Five: What are the implications for improved teaching and learning of Standard English in community college level composition classes for Teachers and African American students? Positive statements were made in the interviews that could be used as a good starting point in meeting the needs of African American students and perhaps help them to understand these language dimensions. Some of these were removing the negative connotations that people associate with Ebonics, and helping African American students to understand that

it isn't a question of right and wrong. One is just different. By giving students the rationale between SE and BD, they might understand that teachers are trying to help them. One participant noted that he had heard many negative statements made by educated people about Ebonics that he thought were ignorant..

As well, some statements made by faculty are seen as hindering student learning. Comments such as teachers can't be expected to care if students don't. One participant sees it as the student's choice to accept or not accept SE. If he wants to fail, that is the student's choice. Yet, most students do not come to college to fail. There is any number of reasons why a student fails, and not being able to grasp SE concepts is one of them. Participants found it difficult to address questions that were geared specifically to African Americans students. Instead, they used analogies to other groups. These analogies are ill suited to African American students because they have endured a unique experience unlike any other group in this country. No other group has been enslaved in such a manner as the African American. African Americans today remain in a suspended state of slavery because they are still discriminated against.

Dichotomy of Worlds emerged as a theme: while whites and blacks, for the most part, have resided in two separate worlds since slavery, this theme resonated throughout the transcripts. In the classroom, the white world (teaching philosophy/microcosm of the larger society) and the black world (African American students/home and community) come together. One is deemed formal and the other informal. There is a time and place for each one. The formal world becomes the "real world," and is the only world that really matters because this is where all the power is wielded. This insinuates to the black student that his home and community doesn't count. When students are bombarded with negative comments and statements about their language throughout their lifetime, these negative connotations are internalized. These associations remain in the psyche of blacks and whites alike.

Renouncement of the African American student's culture and community is the price that he or she must pay in order to enter the world of the white and the powerful. There is ambivalence on the part of the African American student; he or she wants this power, but deep in his or her psyche there remains unattended feelings of what the white world represents: cruelty, oppression, and denial of opportunities. This can sometimes get in

the way of his learning. Also, the student cannot bring his or her "dirty language" (Ebonics) into the "pure" (white) classroom, but he or she needs to in order to understand the differences between BD and SE. This brings on feeling of confusion and frustration for the student as he tries to learn. When some faculty say that African American students are unwilling to embrace SE, they should see this as a logical reaction. Who in their right mind would embrace that which oppresses? It's illogical. The following excerpts from the faculty interviews show the dichotomy of the white and black worlds. Also underlined are words that denote power divisions between SE and BD:

> **Faculty #1**: I think that ultimately they [students] have to see the non-standard language, as their home language. I would never want to denigrate it because we've got so many different, rich ways of expressing themselves coming out of these different cultural groups in the United States. At the same time, the reality of the market place, the reality of the majority is that there is a Standard English, which is the one embraced by commerce.…If your second language is just another form of English, I think that that's a heck of a trick. But I think that they have to if they want to participate in the larger world, then they have to recognize it.
>
> **Faculty #2**: It doesn't mean it's inferior. It means it's not proper when it's used in the English classroom.…There are times when things are proper when it will get your point across, and there are times when what you want is not going to reach because of what you are doing. So there are times when I switch an approach or make a point, but pretty much it is standard because everyone has different things

that need to be corrected and that is just another thing...You already know how to be informal. We are trying to teach you the formal aspect, so you can fit different places and if we don't do that, we are doing you a disservice.

[When asked what his experiences were with African American students] I think I relate closer, not to African American students, but I can relate it closer to city students versus suburban students and that doesn't necessarily mean African American students. [A discussion of city versus suburban kids takes place, and the issue of African American students is lost.]

[Similarly, when asked if he saw a relationship between identity and Ebonics, this is his reply.] No more so than with other groups using the language of their group. Everyone wants to feel like they belong to a group.

Faculty #3: [Discussing skills that students should have] It is stopping and thinking before I say something, so it comes out in a fluid way, and I've used the structures, and I'm familiar with the language, and those structures are going to be understood and the language I use is going to be understood because it follows a speech pattern that is equal to that audience out there...

My understanding is it is that you have to understand where you're using it and that's me as an instructor. Also, the student must understand where he is, and again if I consider the audience, I expect them to consider the audience also. And there are certain times to use this, non-standard. And there are certain times to use the standard.

Well, then we can have texts of Ebonics. But again, there's a certain audience, there's a certain language group, there's a certain community that has to use that....It's not saying, oh, what you are doing is wrong. It is another modality that you are going to have to follow if you are going to have success in a formal world. I feel many times for the black students who don't cut the mustard because I know it's either because they're unwilling to change or they're saying you're telling me that what I'm doing is wrong. I think that's wrong for us to impart that. I think you have to show

them that these are the other structures that are acceptable. Yours are acceptable in you speech community. There is another speech community out here that your are going to have to recognize too.

African American Student Investigations

Data from the first three African American students interviews are included. Students were interviewed twice for at least an hour in order to ascertain their views on SE and Ebonics. The interview was conducted in order to answer the Research Questions. The data is grouped in response to each of these questions, as well the category of alienation emerged from the investigation.

African American Student Backgrounds

Each of the three students has taken at least one composition course at the community college. They range in ages from twenty to twenty-seven. One came from New York City to upstate New York at a young age, another was raised mainly in Detroit, and the other has been upstate for a few years; he grew up in Illinois. One or both of their parents have attended college. Two have experienced difficulty with composition and must repeat the course. Black Dialect structures were detected in two of their writing samples.

Question three: What are African American students' attitudes toward Standard English? The Literature Review points out that this can be a difficult area for students to master. English is not the participants' favorite subject, and two feel lost in class. Two enjoyed writing stories and poetry before college. One participant felt that she was better able to put her thoughts down on paper back in high school. Now she finds the whole process frustrating and often assumes an "I don't care" attitude, to the point that she will tear up the paper and start crying. She says, "It's a lot different the way you talk. That's the hardest part of writing is you can't say what you mean." Another student felt that learning English in high school was confusing because of terms that were unfamiliar, such as metaphors. It was like learning another language because he hardly ever speaks it. He says that he is not around white people that much to want to speak the language that much. He said you might use it when you go to the store. He feels that blacks must hold onto Ebonics in order to stay one step ahead of white people. This is because Ebonics is always evolving. All participants agree that SE is a tool to get what they want and that is why they want to learn it. All engage in code-switching. They try

to speak in standard format while around whites, although they mention that BD has and does come out at times when they are trying to suppress it.

Question Four: What are African American student's attitude toward Ebonics? This question was asked to understand African American students' view toward Ebonics. Participants felt that they were being real when they used BD. BD is who they are. All of the participants had no real knowledge of the origins of BD although one participant said that it was a dialect that originated in jails. Inmates even today have to switch up the language in order to stay one step ahead of the jail personnel. He relates the present day jails to the prison system of slavery, and how back then the language was changed for the same reasons. One participant said that at one time he felt like leaving BD and his blackness behind while striving to get ahead, but he said that white people/cops always try to break you down to remind you that you are a "nigger." One participant sees BD as jazzy, slick talk, and being creative. He says that it will always be a part of him. He says, "It's like saying forget about how you coming up, forget the struggle you went through, forget your friends, forget about your family, forget about what got you to this point, what made you change

from that to this. But that's still a part of you." One participant said that he wants to always be able to communicate to his people. All participants felt that white people are constantly copying BD.

Question Five: What are the implications for improved teaching and learning of Standard English in community college level composition classes for teachers and African American students? Participants talked about some positive college learning experiences. One student felt that student teacher ratio worked well at the college. Another participant talked about the comfort level of the class he took and the group work that made the class more user friendly. Most students knew what it would take to be successful, such as going to see the teacher to review paper comments and go to the writing skills center. Although one participant tried both of these approaches and was no better off.

Alienation emerged as a theme: All of the participants discussed some feelings of alienation during their educational experiences and most had little knowledge of African American history. Each remembers a small section on African American history being taught in high school. Two participants remembered being the only black person in their class during a black history

lesson, so all the attention suddenly became focused on them. One participant says that the teacher singled her out, asking her in front of the class, why do black people have nappy hair and other such insulting questions. Another participant remembered the class turning to him and asking him how he felt about it (an incident in black history). He said it was his mother who helped him through this difficult period by explaining to him that people were just curious. Another participant said that all he learned about black history in school was that "we were slaves. That basically we should be grateful for the freedom that we have now." He says that he was taught about acceptable blacks like Frederick Douglass. "Those people that did have white friends, and so on and so on, just to teach us that we can get along with the white people." He says that school is like being in jail because everything is about conforming. With schools you'll never learn about the person who you are. Schools take you further away from the person that you really are. It doesn't give you the tools that you'll really need in life.

Discussion

A review of the literature shows that knowledge of BD along with positive teacher attitudes is necessary for effective teaching-learning. And as Turner (1985) points out, teachers of English have not been sufficiently trained in language issues, and so they are often at a loss in how to help their students. This forces them to take a position on an issue of which they have little understanding. From this college level research, it is clear that faculty are lacking sufficient understanding about BD. They have to decide that this issue is important enough for them to address it.

How will they accomplish this if they do not think that it is urgent? Researchers of Ebonics can lead faculty in making the important decision to become more involved by continuing to present research that illustrates how important this issue is to the teaching-learning process of SE, for their success as teachers and for the success of their African American students. Researchers of Ebonics must continue to do this in spite of the negative responses that they receive for advancing scholarship in this area. Someone must address the issue of black student failure as it relates to the African American student specifically, and the time to do this is now. Marback (2001) says that it is a difficult task but that we have

to find ways "to talk about attitudes and practices so that we may condemn using language conventions to consolidate the power of literacy education to exclude minority students" (p. 29).

For the African American students in this study, their identities are tied to their language. BD has allowed blacks to navigate the two worlds they live between, the two separate realities. It is a source of power because it allows them to have a separate identity that they can be proud of in its own right since they still have not been fully accepted by mainstream America. They should not be expected to negate their language in order to utilize SE as a tool.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1) Educators must be mindful that the community college classroom is a microcosm of the larger society. Ingrained in the psyche of both black and white are the negative and positive connotations about their language. Therefore educators should be weight the language that they use when referring to Standard English and Black Dialect/Ebonics.

2) Educators need to be aware that African American students will sometimes express themselves using Black Dialect/Ebonics because this is the discourse in which they may be most familiar. Rejecting its usage may turn students

off to learning. Instead educators should use Black Dialect/Ebonics as the starting point for students to get from where they are to where they need to go.

3) Educators need to examine their own prejudices to Black Dialect/Ebonics since many see it as an unacceptable form of communication. In order to do this they must understand the historical and structural usage of Black Dialect/Ebonics.

4) Educators must understand that the researchers of Black Dialect/Ebonics are not asking them to embrace the language but to understand it in order to help their African American students to be successful in grasping Standard English concepts in writing. Again, if they cannot do this, then they must examine their prejudices toward the language.

5) Most black students have been miseducated in some fashion by the time they have arrived at college. This can be even a denial or rejection of their history. This leaves them in a position to not be able to critically assess the world around them.

6) Many African American students have experienced feelings of alienation in the classroom at one time or another in k-12 because they were different or because of what their particular difference represented to society. They may not have the wherewithal to sift through more layers of discouragement at the community college level, which may appear to them to be more challenging.

7) African American students are capable of imitating oral Standard English and are aware in which instances that they are expected to use it. Imitating the written Standard English presents much more difficulty since it is much more scrutinized that the oral usage.

8) African American students believe that it is important to learn the standard format for future success; however, since they have little occasion to use Standard English in their everyday lives, the motivation for doing so is not great. Therefore assignments should be tailored more toward actual writing assignments that they will be engaged in later on or that they can engage themselves in now. This might be writing a letter to the editor addressing a relevant concern in their community or a personal statement that might be required as part of a college application. This type of meaningful writing will give students power and control over their own lives, and it can serve as a motivating force.

9) African American students enjoy using Black Dialect/Ebonics and have no intention of trading it in for Standard English; however, they have a willingness to learn and utilize Standard English as a tool in the current socio-political climate.

10) A useful follow-up study would be an examination of current theories of writing at the community college level with African American students' own process for writing. Earlier studies with bi-cultural and bi-lingual graduate students (Galvan 1985) shows that the process approach in

> writing was in opposition to these students' linguistic, cognitive, and cultural backgrounds. We need to understand what African American students actually do when they write and how the current composing process hinders or promotes their acquisition of Standard English skills.

All of these recommendations are important if we want African American students to be successful in learning Standard English skills. There is also a strong possibility that this success will lend itself to other academic subjects. If students feel that they are capable of achieving success and that they have power over their own lives, then they can become the makers of their own future success. Faculty must do their part and meet these students half way. As two of the African American student participants said, sometimes the teacher has to come down to the student's level to help him understand.

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